

# THE TRAVELLERS

**T**HEY are the most unlikely of allies. One is a traveller, a mother of four with straggly bleached blonde hair, who had a very basic education and grew up in a caravan. The other is an earnest Cambridge University graduate who was born with the proverbial silver spoon in her mouth.

What the two have in common is the controversial Dale Farm travellers' camp near Basildon in Essex.

The traveller is Kathleen McCarthy, a 48-year-old resident of Dale Farm who faces eviction from the site. Standing beside her, as she holds forth on human rights, is Natalie Szarek, the American-born Cambridge graduate who is campaigning on behalf of Dale Farm residents and whose story could not be more different from theirs.

Today, for reasons best known to herself, she calls herself Natalie Fox. She has lived at the site for the past month as head of the Dale Farm Solidarity group. She helped set up Camp Constant to defend the travellers against the firm of bailiffs, Constant & Co, which has a multi-million-pound contract to clear Dale Farm.

Szarek helps the travellers to practise building barricades and resistance strategies, and runs perimeter patrols and eviction workshops — while also managing the media.

She also happens to be the daughter of eminent academics.

Szarek, 24, grew up in a large detached house in a wealthy area of Cleveland, Ohio. She went to an exclusive private school in the city and her parents are professors at the private Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland.

But then, Natalie is just one of an extraordinary collection of wealthy and entitled activists who have temporarily ditched their comfortable existence and flocked to Dale Farm



by **Zoe Brennan**

to support the travellers. It emerged this week that another of the self-styled leaders of the Dale Farm protesters is a Cambridge University-educated blow-in as well.

His name is Jacob Wills, who like many other activists has also bafflingly changed his name — in his case to Jake Fulton.

His parents, too, are eminent professors at leading universities.

Wills, 22, grew up in a £1million house in fashionable Tufnell Park, North London, and attended the sought-after Catholic London Oratory School, where Tony Blair sent his children.

He went on to King's College,

**Cambridge graduates. The sons and daughters of professors. Grammar school boys. How a clique of very privileged young Left-wing activists is advising the law-defying travellers of Dale Farm**

Cambridge. There, he studied English literature and was the Socialist Worker representative.

His mother Clair Wills, 48, is a professor of Irish literature at Queen Mary, part of the University of London, and his stepfather Peter Dews, 59, is a professor of philosophy at the University of Essex.

His father is Ken Hirschkop, an American professor and a leading expert in Marxist literary theory.

A school photograph shows him with short hair, diligently playing the violin. Today, he looks rather different,

his hair close-shaved around the sides, the rest hanging in long rat-tails down his back, activist style.

He resembles the eco-warrior Swampy — but sounds rather different. Indeed, one pundit has posted next to a YouTube clip of Wills promoting the travellers' case: 'Has Swampy been taking elocution lessons? He has gone all posh.'

Szarek and Wills have been arrested several times for taking part in direct action protests in recent years.

Szarek was one of the leaders of the pro-Gaza occupation of Cambridge

University's law faculty in 2009, and was arrested during a climate change protest in Nottingham.

She has a long history of activism. One contemporary at Cambridge University recalls: 'She was Women's Officer at Cambridge, and she was absolutely loathed. She was a real kill-joy and would come down like a ton of bricks on any fun.'

'She didn't like anything that smacked of sexism, even if it was light-hearted. She was terribly humourless, and not well loved. She would often get a bee in her bonnet



# PROTESTERS' TOWERS



Eminent parents: Natalie Szarek



A well-spoken Swampy: Jacob Wills



for the worst. Barricades and a massive concrete-filled car called "the beast" were in place ready to deter any potential onslaught.

"Things were tense but it was a good kind of tension, spirits were high and the scaffolding was filled with activists and gypsies singing, chanting slogans and ready to resist."

May-Bowles is also said to be involved with UK Uncut — a protest group which has targeted Barclays, Topshop and Vodafone for alleged tax avoidance with a series of sit-ins.

Like all the activists, he eulogises the traveller lifestyle. He ends his blog with a call to arms: "The main point I'm trying to make is this — come to Dale Farm. You'll be doing something amazing and you'll have an amazing time doing it."

"It's about half-an-hour out of London on the train — Liverpool Street to Wickford. Call [he gives mobile telephone numbers] once you're on your way to arrange a lift."

"Piece of p\*\*\*. If you could bring some spare cups or cutlery, that would be nice."

Indeed, Dale Farm Solidarity has put out an appeal on its website for a shopping list of items, including energy bars and extra blankets.

There is even a Dale Farm Solidarity welcome pack available online, giving directions and instructions, 'key messages' and a quick political primer.

It says: "It's crucial we act with real sensitivity and take our lead from the residents here. If the worst happens, we can go back to our comfortable homes." It also gives 'bust card info' — instructions on what to do if arrested.

There are now around 100 protesters at the camp — the majority of them well-educated and middle-class. One commentator who has infiltrated the camp describes them as a '100-strong





PICTURES: MARK BULLMORE/REX / BBC / LUCY YOU

nting eviction: Two young travellers demonstrating at the Dale Farm site

it something that didn't bother body else.'

arek and Wills are not the only Farm activists with a gilded ground. There is also one Yoshka rik, who was 'outed' as an acale whose real name is Dr Jonathan enheim, one of the world's ing physicists who works along- Professor Stephen Hawking.

en confronted by journalists, the en-headed Dr Oppenheim, 37, a ul Society Research Fellow and ert in quantum information ry and quantum gravity, admitted real identity and claimed the ellers were victims of a 'socially ptable form of racism'.

ant do these well-to-do types do ale Farm? YouTube clips of life at p Constant show them slow- ting tomatoes, neatly doing the ing up and carefully separating their recycling — something you t find the travellers doing.

aw is spread on the ground in Camp Constant activists' white quee, where they sit on plastic rs. Some have children with n, who are engaged in arts and ts activities, while the adults d 'workshops' or run the 'café'. very different to the chaos of the ounding traveller camp.

ese sympathisers make emotive o clips for YouTube of pretty rish traveller women saying r gas has been turned off and

explaining what this will mean for 'the chilr'n'. Curiously, these video clips make no mention of the fact that so many Dale Farm residents built their homes without planning permission.

Instead, a young man with a plummy accent and John Lennon glasses provides a commentary, using words such as 'atrocious', which hardly chime with the vocabulary used by travellers.

One young protester is studying philosophy at Bristol University. He told a reporter: 'When the police

## It's Glastonbury Festival with a cause attached

come, we won't be moved. We'll fight to the death for this place.'

He then admitted he had to leave the camp soon, as 'I need to knuckle down for my last year of uni'.

A man called Angus is another well-to-do activist — he was squatting in an East London house until discovering Camp Constant.

Emma, 18, is a young French woman who has chained herself to the camp gates with a bicycle D-lock around

her neck. She has been taking part in protest camps since her mid-teens, travelling around Europe.

She has attached a warning sign for the bailiffs which reads: 'Danger of death. Behind this gate a woman is attached by her neck. If you attempt to open this gate you will kill her.'

Another protester has handcuffed himself to a pole set in concrete. He is Dean Puckett, 29, and he did a degree in film production at the Surrey Institute of Art & Design.

He has made films about living in the Kew Bridge Eco-Village in London, and the tented Democracy Village in Parliament Square. He is also involved with the anti-fox-hunting campaign, and supports the Palestinians' cause.

A 'jobs list' is chalked in cheery yellow, blue and pink on a blackboard at the camp. It is comically middle-class, like a star chart stuck up on a family fridge to encourage children to perform their chores.

Tasks include 'litter picking — get bin bags from kitchen'; 'create areas for recycling by hut'; and 'clear-up mugs and plates'.

In one film, the activists are shown sitting around a campfire listening to Eastern European gypsies playing the fiddle. The gypsies have been brought in to the camp; in this romanticised clip the Irish travellers are nowhere to be seen.

In another segment, the activists

## Pie thrower: Jonathan May-Bowles

light Oriental paper lanterns, and send them up into the night sky, amid much cheering.

It is like the Glastonbury Festival, with a cause attached. But then, this is the attraction of Camp Constant.

Szarek and Wills no doubt find themselves at home here — because although Wills has proclaimed on television that they have been welcomed with open arms by the travellers and are living side-by-side, in fact they are bedding down alongside other similarly middle-class activists.

One recent arrival gives an account of life at Camp Constant on his blog. Using the name Jonnie Marbles, he writes: 'The activists are spread throughout the campsite, but their main HQ, nicknamed Camp Constant, has a lovely kitchen and campfire around which activists and gypsies gather together to chat, eat and get a little tipsy in the evening.'

Marbles — real name Jonathan May-Bowles — has become something of a celebrity after throwing a foam pie into media tycoon Rupert Murdoch's face at a Parliamentary committee hearing in July.

The 26-year-old, a part-time stand-up comedian from Windsor, Berkshire, was sentenced to six weeks in jail for the Murdoch attack.

Now the father-of-one has joined the travellers to try to prevent their eviction. May-Bowles, who went to the prestigious St Bernard's Roman Catholic Grammar School in Slough, adds: 'When we arrived, there were people sorting themselves into groups and finding roles. My role was that of a medic.'

Describing the farcical stand-off with bailiffs last month, he writes: 'We were expecting the eviction to begin as early as 8am so the morning was filled with activity — building barricades, scouting the perimeter, playing up to or avoiding cameras.'

Just after lunchtime, a shout went up that the bailiffs were coming. We rushed down to the front gate ready

at says. Many simply seemed to be on a jolly, downing whisky until they passed out by the campfire.

'Some have given themselves hippy names, such as Phoenix, and blokes sport obligatory wispy facial hair and nose rings.'

'These are bored kids from privileged backgrounds. There was no socialising with the travellers — apart from

## 'They can barely understand the posh accents'

anything else, they could barely understand each other's accents.'

And they are all preparing for a fight. It has been rumoured that they are filling plastic bags full of excrement to use as ammunition to hurl at the police.

There is an older contingent, too. Among them is Olivia Boland, a 56-year-old Tory-voting antiques dealer. Another is Susanna Mitchell-Cotts, the 66-year-old daughter of a baronet, who has threatened to chain herself to the barricades.

She said: 'When I saw what was happening on TV, I felt so strongly about it that I had to come down. We're all anarchists now!'

Then, inevitably, there is Vanessa Redgrave, the darling of radicals and lost causes for decades, who is often on site to speak to television crews.

Her late brother, Corin, suffered a heart attack in 2005 while pleading with councillors not to evict the travellers from Dale Farm. Vanessa, a veteran of the Trotskyist Workers' Revolutionary Party, said: 'Forty travellers came to the Basildon hospital to pray for him.'

How touching. But like Vanessa, the Jakes, Olivias, Anguses, Deans and Emmas will find other causes to latch on to once the eviction is over — secure in the knowledge that they can return to their cosy, gilded life-style whenever they choose.